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BOOK REVIEWS

**Philosophy: An Introduction through Literature**, by Kleiman, Lowell and Lewis, Stephen, St. Pauls, Minnesota, Paragon House, 1992

My interest in philosophical ideas arose in my teens, whilst still at secondary school in New Zealand, when I became interested in the writings of D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Graham Greene and John Steinbeck in particular. But these thinkers were not on the official reading lists, nor were they seen as philosophers. And what we had in our library on philosophy - Bertrand Russell and Clement Joad - were dense and boring to me at that time. They made little effect on my understanding of some philosophical ideas, whereas, on the other hand, the writers above aided me in arriving at some kind of philosophical position in my late teens.

If one is interested in the possible relationships between philosophy and other literary works then Lowell Kleiman's and Stephen Lewis' book, *Philosophy: An Introduction through Literature* promises to be interesting. But the tide promises more than it delivers in the text. The problems arise from the tide, especially in the interpretation of the term 'literature'. There are sixty-two extracts in this book, of which eight might be interpreted as *literary* and the remaining are extracts from philosophical texts. Aren't they also literary? Well that is one of the problems of this book. Is there a cleft between literary texts and philosophical texts? Somewhat ironically an extract from one who did much to create this cleft or division, Bertrand Russell, is included. Russell was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, as there is no separate prize for philosophy. Henri Bergson was also awarded this prize in 1928 and Albert Camus in 1960. Jean-Paul Sartre refused the offer of nomination.

Well the philosophical texts in the collection are certainly *literature* but this is where the ambiguity in the tide arises. It might have been better for this book had the authors inserted the term 'philosophical' before 'literature' in the tide. In that case it would have been clearer that this was just another introductory reader to philosophy. But what of the other literary extracts? Do they not make the book more interesting, philosophically, by including what at first sight seem not to be philosophical texts? Initially that was my reaction but it was soon to be allayed. Had I been able to look inside the book - it was sealed in a plastic cover in the Borders bookshop in Sydney where I made the purchase - then I might not have purchased it. However I am glad that I did for it helped me to clarify my own thinking on the relationships, if any, between literary and philosophical texts.

My own thinking is very different from that of Kleiman and Lewis. In effect it would be 'defined' in opposition to their approach to philosophy in literary texts as exhibited in their book. Their use of literary texts is not so much to see what the author thinks philosophically and what philosophical ideas the text assumes or uses but to use the text for traditional philosophical analytical analysis, with a set of standard questions starting with epistemology. Thus the potential for considering what philosophical ideas are employed, or what ideas presented might be considered as philosophical, are occluded. I will illustrate this by their approach to the James Joyce extract, entitled *Araby*, which is taken from Joyce's *Dubliners*.

This is the story of a young man who is infatuated with the elder sister of a friend, Mangan. The young man is the narrator of the story. Whilst there are descriptions of the girl's physical attributes - "her dress swung as she moved her body" (1992: 6) - the descriptions of their 'relationship' are all of the young man's manoeuvres to see her, and observe her, and of his own mental states which describe his infatuation. There is no indication initially that she has any interest in the narrator.

However the sister speaks to him and asks if he was going to the Ara by market. It is clear that she wanted to go but could not go because of a retreat. Finally the boy says that he will bring her something. One of the good things about the book is the written guidance given by the authors to the assumed philosophically unsophisticated reader, and the questions for discussion also provided by the authors, whether one agrees with them or not. However the first question on this section, and the first in the book is (9):

What *objective* evidence is there in the story concerning Mangan's sister's attitude towards the narrator (author's emphasis)?

My first comment would be on the use of 'objective'. Why 'objective', and why has 'objective' been given a primary position in the opening question? Given that it is the first question that is asked, and there are lots of extracts to follow on the nature of knowledge, is this a preparation for a certain view of knowledge and of philosophy? Is the knowledge, which the narrator has of his own inner states and feelings, of no account philosophically?

The authors' introduction to this account puts this possibility down. They say that he is a young boy moving into adolescence and becoming aware of his own sexuality. If he is an adolescent that is not said so in the text. The authors say that the sister is *somewhat* older than the brother. But it is only said in the text that she is an elder sister. Nor is it said in the text that the brother is the same age as the narrator - only that they play together. It is not even clear that they are in the same class or even go to the same school. What is clear is that the narrator goes to school on his own. Thus Mangan might have been one or two years younger and the sister the *same* age as the narrator. He may be becoming aware of his sexuality but the account of his inner states might well pertain also to besotted adult males.

They also claim that the narrator's final comment, namely "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity" (9), shows that he has been a fool in his belief that Mangan's sister could be seriously interested in him (5). The reason given depends upon a pointless conversation between a female stall-holder and two young men at the market, which the narrator overhears. But I do not believe that their conclusion can be drawn from the text of *Araby*. (This is an unabridged copy of the original text in Joyce's *Dubliners*.)

A quite different reading can be given to the abstract. When Mangan's sister asks the narrator if he is going to the market, that she cannot go because of a retreat, and that "it's well for you" (7), she may have been making an approach to talk to him about something which they might have done together. It could have been a shared interest and outing. So she is urging him to go. The narrator misreads the situation and thinks that if he brings her something she may talk with him and pay him some attention. But she did not ask him to do any such thing. However she has already broken that barrier, not by mere talk, but by raising the possibility of shared interests and outings. It can be argued that she wanted to enter into some form of human relationship with the narrator. It can be suggested that it is because of the pointless banter between the people at the stall that he realises he had misunderstood her approach to him, and possibly that his offer to bring her something destroyed the possibility of any such relationship. That is why, it can be suggested, his "eyes burned with anguish and anger".

The authors treat this as a question of muddled beliefs for none of which the narrator has evidence, yet clearly believes that he knows to be the case. The remaining seven questions for discussion (9) are also about knowledge, beliefs and evidence. But that is a very limited reading of *Araby*. Of course analytic analysis can be applied to literary texts. But if the assumptions underlying that analysis are those of traditional Anglo-American philosophy - as is clear in the selection of extracts in this book - then perhaps their analysis (5) and their questions (9) are what you get.

On the other hand if you start with the Socratic notion that philosophy is concerned with the self, and the care and improvement of the self, and then with personal identity and its relationship with the other, for example, then you might come out with something like this reading of *Araby*.

The former analytic analysis does not attempt to identify Joyce's philosophical ideas in *Araby*, whereas the second does. I have already hinted at these above. First we have a narcissistic young man, possibly a boy, or possibly an adolescent (but a creature driven by vanity) (9). The narrator takes every opportunity to observe Mangan's sister - in modern parlance we might say he was stalking her. He believes or imposes upon her an identity in which she is really interested in him. That is really part of his narcissism - her relationship to him is needed by him. But he has developed his own identity it would seem. It is not quite clear here what his relationship to his aunt was, though that to his uncle did not seem to be good.

Second, at the market he realises from the pointless banter what has gone wrong. His vanity, his narcissism, had resulted in a self which could only see others as useful for his own purposes. Initially this is how he interprets their discussion, but the market banter makes him realise not only that she was communicating with him in offering to share interests and activities but also, without the other, that his self was an impoverished one.

We should also site this story in early twentieth century Dublin. She is a young Catholic girl with considerable constraints upon her. She may well have been interested in the narrator, who would have been ironically right. That she approaches him may have been an attempt to stop an 'idiotic' situation of silent stalking. Another reason may have been her younger brother whose teasing about a boyfriend may have been difficult for her and for family relationships.

So Joyce is talking about the importance of the Other in establishing personal identity, in caring for the self and in establishing good human relationships. But he is also talking about the ambiguity of these human matters and how they are not fixed in concrete. There is little or no attempt by the authors to identify these philosophical ideas through their set of questions.

For those interested in how philosophy and literary writing might be reconciled this book does nothing for you. In its treatment of literary works it plays the standard Anglo-American philosophical moves. In its treatment of all texts it makes these same moves.

For those interested in the introduction of students to traditional Anglo-American philosophy and its critics, this collection is rather rich. In Part I, entitled 'Knowledge', Plato, Descartes and Rorty are featured along with the first item of Joyce's *Araby*. Part II includes Aristotle, Austin, Blanshard and Peirce. The third section, 'Personal Identity' includes Ryle, Locke and Hume, but in my view, even in this tradition, it has missed several thinkers - especially Strawson - and within the tradition, the continentals. Again Part IV, on Ethics, includes some standards - Kant, Mill, Ayer and Baier - for example, but I thought the selections in this section not to be universal. In the section on justice where is Derrida, for example? On the selections regarding religious beliefs, I do not believe I am competent to comment. Finally, Part VII on Freedom, Fatalism and Determinism is, I believe, dated by its choice of authors from Ryle to Austin.

These points are not to be interpreted as critiques within the Anglo-American analytical approach to Descartes, Hume, Kant, ... Ayer, Ryle and Austin (for example). The critique is concerned with the selection of the extracts and, therefore, through the questions, the closing down of other potential philosophical possibilities obtainable in literary works.

For those interested in bridging the distinction between philosophy and literary texts it would be more helpful to turn to works such as Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Huis Clos* and the novel *Nausea*; Camus' *Caligula*, his novels and his journalism, e.g. "Letters to a German Friend"; Simone de Beauvoir's novels *She Came to Stay*, *The Blood of Others* and *The Madarins*; and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Then there are Joyce, Shaw, Orwell, Lawrence, Greene, Steinbeck, Miller ... And what of Picasso's *Guernica*? Does that not make a number of philosophical 'statements'? I have

reviewed this (1992) book because it is just the wrong way, in my view, to look philosophically at literary works.

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